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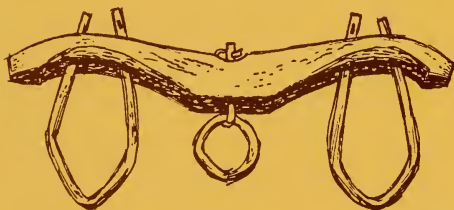
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Thompson, Dorothy

Lincoln Papers

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**The
Lincoln Papers
Dorothy Thompson**



Lincoln Papers



Dorothy Thompson



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The opening of the long-sealed Lincoln letters and documents in the Library of Congress, kept from the public eye for so long by the decision of the Civil War president's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, has been preceded for years by speculations regarding their content.

Certainly they would throw new light on, or at least supply new details about, one of the most decisive administrations in American history. But would they shed new light upon the somber, central figure, the tragic hero, the myth-creator, in his life-time as vehemently hated as he was respected & loved?

There are souls who would, even if subconsciously, wish it: Men who can't endure the illustrious lest they appear to themselves grovelling; those whose ears lengthen to every

**gossip concerning weaknesses of
of the great, character assassins by
avocation, ever seeking to impugn
motives, denigrate the lofty, reduce
even the Sermon on the Mount to a
trade-union manifesto; those from
the realm of the hunchbacks to whom
in Edna St Vincent Millay's imagery
the strong, straight spine appears
grotesque—a cause for clucking in
the children.**

A whole school of historians has
arisen which interprets history
from the snake's-eye view of the gos-
sip columnist. They look under and
into beds, elevate an incident into a
basic cause, find conspiracy behind
each error, a leader's vice in every
lost battle, and a consideration of a
personal interest behind ev'ry judg-
ment.

Distortions of psychoanalysis help-
ed them. No character is what it

seems. Destiny is not character, for character presumes the illusion of free will. A man has no free will; he is determined by his infantile conditionings affecting his sexual impulse, his public and private acts.

The Marxists helped them. Economics is destiny. The means of production create the Zeitgeist, and the Zeitgeist the man. Everything that happens—that a man happens, that a Lincoln or a Christ happens—is “inevitable”. If it had not been one man it would have been another, each a cog in a mechanical universe of greater or lesser cogs, and without even a deus ex machina.

Those exponents of democracy who see in it only a way of counting heads help the debunkers. They are the glorifiers of the “common man” who think to defend him by debasing the uncommon. They are flatterers

of mediocrity, organizing it to push down every head that rises above the mass level, & by meanness win the suffrages of the mean. They pride themselves to vulgarize speech, to boast of their own commonness, & snicker at the great and thus they help the debunkers too.

But now the Bluebeard's chamber is opened, and what do we find? Only an empty room in which sits the shade of the man we always knew was there: Lanky and stooped, his bony hands resting, like a farmer's, on spread knees; the eyes deep-set & tragically melancholy, the wide, humorous mouth moulded by half bitter humor, the craggy cheeks furrowed with laughter and pain — the old, the familiar, the beloved figure, the authentic American Hero.

What should we have expected? Can a man fall out of his skin?

Was not the author of the Gettysburg Address, & the even more profound 2d Inaugural, their author? Even if we should find that his was not the pen, are they not his spirit? Did not humility breathe in every word of the Hero whom circumstances forced to a dictatorship of necessity? Did not he, whom the doctrinaires excoriated as irreligious, speak of God as only those can who live with Him? Was it not he who said, "I find myself often going to my knees in the certain conviction that there is no where else to go"?

The man is exactly what he seemed to be == what the myth, after the dying down of political passions, revealed him to be in the minds and hearts of the people: The man who caused the poet to mourn when lilacs last in the door yard bloomed, and the great star hung in the western

sky, and to mourn and re-mourn with the American people, with ever returning spring.

Man and myth are One, and the oneness is the truth. The truth is leadership with humility, war with compassion, peace with "malice toward none" and "charity for all," and "firmness in the right, as *"God gives us to see the right."* It is ever that humble note of doubt and quest==the man who had to "finish the work that we are in;" the man whom another man shot and killed. But the assassin was unable to kill the truth, unable to kill the myth == which lives on and shall not perish from the earth, unless and until that to which his soul was wedded shall perish from the earth: The people's government continually, und'r God, reborn in freedom.

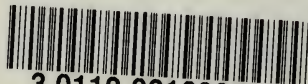
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